

NH Guardsmen train for combat

By BOB LAPREE
Union Leader

A TOTAL of 400 New Hampshire National Guardsmen from the 197th and 172nd Field Artillery Battalions are at Fort Drum in northern New York to refresh their artillery skills.



Sgt. Richard Randlett of Franklin sights the target of a 155mm howitzer as a New Hampshire National Guard artillery battery trains in direct fire while on annual training at Fort Drum. (BOB LAPREE)

For two weeks, the units practice the full array of tasks of simulated combat missions - from rapid set-up and firing of the guns to targeting and fire direction under field deployment conditions.



Spc. Chris Duquette, left, of Epsom and 1st Sgt. Craig Lavallee of Manchester discuss details of their mission. (BOB LAPREE)

Using a 155mm howitzer, Guardsmen train in "direct fire," when the target is visible. This is unusual for artillery units, since most targets are up to 18 miles away. It is a skill that needs to be honed and offers the gun crews the chance to actually see their shell hit the target.

There has been additional training in urban combat skills which have become necessary for deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan when such units have been assigned to non-artillery combat support roles.

These two-week deployments are an annual commitment in addition to the one weekend a month training sessions the Guard requires to maintain the needed level of readiness.

